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THE GINGER KING - 7 INSTALLMENTS

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GUNSTON CLASSICS
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GUNSTON CLASSICS

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GABRIEL HANAUD

The French Detective

by

Alfred Edward Woodley Mason

(7 May 1865 – 22 November 1948)

Mason was an English author and Liberal Party Member of Parliament. He is best remembered for his 1902 novel of courage and cowardice in wartime, *The Four Feathers*, and is also known as the creator who was an early template for Agatha Christie's famous Hercule Poirot.

Inspector Gabriel Hanaud is a fictional French detective depicted in a series of five novels, one novella and one short story by the British writer A. E. W. Mason. He has been described as the "first major fiction police detective of the Twentieth Century".

THE GINGER KING

An Inspector Hanaud Story

Strand Magazine Series

7 Installments

First Introduction - August 1940

THE GINGER KING

Installment Part I

Monsieur Hanaud was smoking one of Mr. Ricardo's special Havanas in the dining-room of Mr. Ricardo's fine house in Grosvenor Square. The trial which had fetched him over from Paris had ended that morning. He had eaten a very good lunch with his friend; he had taken the napkin down from his collar; he was at his ease; and as he smoked, alas! He preached.

"Chance, my friend, is the detective's best confederate. A little unimportant word you use and it startles—a strange twist of character is provoked to reveal itself—an odd incident breaks in on the routine of your investigation. And the mind pounces. 'Ping,' you say, if you play the table-

tennis. ‘Pong,’ you say, if you play the Mahjong. And there you are! In at the brush.”
“I beg your pardon.”
For the moment Mr. Ricardo was baffled.
“I said, ‘You are in at the brush,’” Hanaud repeated amicably.
Mr. Ricardo smiled with indulgence. He too had eaten his share of an admirable saddle of lamb and drunk his half of a bottle of exquisite Haut Brion.
“You mean, of course, that you are in at the death,” he said.
“No, no,” Hanaud protested, starting forward. “I do not speak of executions. Detectives are never present at executions and, for me, I find them disgusting. I say, you are in at the brush. It is an idiom from your hunting-field. It means that when all the mess is swept up, you are there, the Man who found the Lady under the thimble.”
Mr. Ricardo was in no mood to pursue his large friend through the winding mazes of his metaphors.
“I am beginning to understand you,” he answered with resignation.
“Yes.” Hanaud nodded his head complacently. “I speak the precision. It is known.”
With a gentle knock, Mr. Ricardo’s incomparable butler Thomson entered the room.
“A Mr. Middleton has called,” he said, offering to Ricardo a visiting-card upon a salver.
Ricardo waved the salver away.
“I do not see visitors immediately after luncheon. It is an unforgivable time to call. Send him away!”

The butler, however, persisted.

“I took the liberty of pointing out that the hour was unseasonable,” he said, “but Mr. Middleton was in hopes that Monsieur Hanaud was staying with you. He seemed very anxious.”

Ricardo took up the card reluctantly. He read aloud.

“Mr. John Middleton, Secretary of the Unicorn Fire Insurance Company. I am myself insured with that firm.” He turned towards his guest. “No doubt he has some reason to excuse him. But it is as you wish.”

Monsieur Hanaud’s strange ambition that afternoon was to climb the Monument and to see the Crown Jewels at the Tower, but his good nature won the day, and since he was to find more than one illustration of the text upon which he had been preaching, he never regretted it.

“I am on view, he said simply.

“We will see Mr. Middleton in the Library,” said Mr. Ricardo; and into that spacious dormitory of deep armchairs and noble books Mr. Middleton was introduced.

Hanaud was delighted with the look of him. Mr. Middleton was a collector’s piece of Victorian England. Middle-aged, with dangling whiskers like lappets at the sides of an otherwise clean-shaved face, very careful and a trifle old-maidish in his speech, he had a tittering laugh and wore the long black frock-coat and the striped trousers which once made the City what is was. He was wreathed in apologies for his intrusion.

“My good friend Superintendent Holloway, of Marlborough Street, whose little property is insured with us, thought that I might find you at Mr. Ricardo’s house. I am very fortunate.”
“I must return to Paris tomorrow,” Hanaud replied. For this afternoon I am at your service. You will smoke?”
From his pocket Hanaud tendered a bright blue packet of black stringy cigarettes, and Mr. Middleton recoiled as if he suddenly saw a cobra on the carpet ready to strike.
“Oh no, no!” he cried in dismay. “A small mild cigar when the day’s work is done. You will forgive me? I have a little story to tell.”
“Proceed!” said Hanaud graciously.
“It is a Mr. Enoch Swallow,” Mr. Middleton began. “I beg you not to be misled by his name. He is a Syrian gentleman by birth and an English gentleman by naturalization. But again I beg you not to be misled. There is nothing of the cunning of the Orient about him. He is a big, plain, simple creature, a peasant, one might say as honest as the day. And it may be so. I make no accusation.”
“He has a business, this honest man?” Hanaud asked.
“He is a furrier.”
“You begin to interest me,” said Hanaud.
“A year ago Enoch Swallow fitted up for his business a house in Berwick Street, towards the Oxford Street end of that long and narrow thoroughfare. The ground floor became his showrooms, he and his wife with a cook-general to wait on them occupied the first floor, and the two storys above

were elaborately arranged for his valuable stock. Then he came to us for an insurance policy."

"Aha!" said Monsieur Hanaud.

"We hesitated," continued Mr. Middleton, stroking one of his side whiskers. "Everything was as it should be—the lease of the house, compliance with the regulations of the County Council, the value of the stock—mink, silver fox, sables—all correct, and yet we hesitated."

"Why?" asked Hanaud.

"Mind, I make no suggestion." Mr. Middleton was very insistent upon his complete detachment. "It was held to be an accident. The Society Universal paid the insurance money. But Mr. Enoch Swallow did have a fire in a similar establishment on the Boulevard Haussmann in Paris three years before."

"Enoch Swallow? The Boulevard Haussmann?" Hanaud dived deep amongst his memories, but came to the surface with empty hands. "No, I do not remember. There was no case."

"Oh dear me, no," Mr. Middleton insisted. "Oh, none at all. Fires happen, else why does one insure? So in the end—it is our business and competition is severe and nothing could have been more straightforward than the conduct of our client—we insured him."

"For a large sum?"

"For twenty-five thousand pounds."

Hanaud whistled. He multiplied the amount into francs. It became milliards.

“For a Syrian gentleman, even if he is now an English gentleman, it is a killing.”

“And then last night it all happens again,” cried Mr. Middleton, giving his whisker a twist and a slap. “Would you believe it?”

“I certainly would,” replied Hanaud, “and without bringing the least pressure upon my credulity.”

Mr. Middleton raised a warning hand.

“But, remember please, there is no accusation. No. All is above board. No smell of petrol in the ruins. No little machine with an alarm-clock. Nothing.”

“And yet…” said Hanaud with a smile. “You have your little thoughts.”

The secretary tittered.

“Monsieur Hanaud,” he said coyly, “I have in my day been something of a dasher. I went once to the Moulin Rouge. I tried once to smoke a stringy black cigarette from a blue packet. But the strings got between my teeth and caused me extreme discomfort. Well, today I have Mr. Enoch Swallow between my teeth.”

Mr. Ricardo, who all this time had been sitting silent, thought it a happy moment to make a little jest that if the secretary swallowed Mr. Swallow, he would suffer even more discomfort. But though Middleton tittered dutifully, Hanaud looked a thousand reproaches and Mr. Ricardo subsided.

“I want to hear of last night,” said Hanaud.

Installment Part II

It was the cook-general's night out. She had permission, moreover, to stay the night with friends at Balham. She had asked for that permission herself. No hint had been given to her that her absence would be welcome. Her friends had invited her and she had sought for this leave on her own initiative.

"Well, then," continued Mr. Middleton, "at six o'clock she laid a cold supper for the Swallows in the dining-room and took an omnibus to Balham. The employees had already gone. The showrooms were closed and only Enoch Swallow and his wife were left in the house. At seven those two ate their supper, and after locking the front door behind them

went to a cinema-house in Oxford Street where a French film was being show. Toto et Fils was the name of the film."

They arrived at the cinema-house a few minutes past eight. There was no doubt whatever about that. For they met the manager of the house, with whom they were acquainted, in the lobby, and talked with him whilst they waited for the earlier performance to end and its audience to disperse. They had seats in the Grand Circle, and there the manager found them just before eleven o'clock, when he brought them the news that their premises were on fire.

"Yes, the incontestable alibi," said Hanaud. "I was waiting for him."

"They hurried home," Middleton resumed, but Hanaud would not allow the word.

"Home? Have such people a home? A place full of little valueless treasures which you would ache to lose? The history of your small triumphs, your great griefs, your happy hours? No, no, we keep to facts. They had a store and a shop and a lodging, they come back and it is all in flames. Good! We continue. When was this fire first noticed?

"About half-past nine, a passer-by saw the smoke curling out from the door. He crossed the street and he saw a flame shoot up and spread behind a window—he thinks on the first floor. But he will not swear that it wasn't on the second. It took him a few minutes to find one of the red pillars where you give the alarm by breaking the glass. The summer has been dry, all those painted pitch-pine shelves in the upper storeys were like tinder. By the time the fire brigade arrived, the

house was a bonfire. By the time the Swallows were discovered in the cinema and ran back to Bewick Street, the floors were crashing down. When the cook-general returned at six-thirty this morning, it was a ruin of debris and tottering walls."

"And the Swallows?" Hanaud asked.

"They had lost everything. They had nothing but the clothes they were wearing. They were taken in for the night at a little hotel in Percy Street."

"The poor people!" said Hanaud with a voice of commiseration and a face like a mask. "And how do they explain the fire?"

"They do not," said Middleton. "The good wife she weeps, the man is distressed and puzzled. He was most careful, he says, and since the fire did not start until some time after he and his wife had left the house, he thinks some burglar is to blame. Ah yes!" and Mr. Middleton pushed himself forward on his chair. "There is a little something. He suggests—it is not very nice—that the burglar may have been a friend of the cook-general. He has no evidence. No. He used to think her a simple, honest, stupid woman and not a good cook, but now he is not sure. No, it is not a nice suggestion."

"But we must remember that he was a Syrian gentleman before he became an English one, must we not?" said Hanaud. "Yes, such suggestions were certainly to be expected. You have seen him?"

"Of course," cried Mr. Middleton, and he edged so much more forward in his chair that it seemed he must topple off.

“And I should esteem it a favour if you, Monsieur Hanaud, and your friend Mr. Ricardo”—he gathered the derelict Ricardo gracefully into the council—“would see him too.”
Hanaud raised his hands in protest.
“It would be an irregularity of the most extreme kind. I have no place in this affair. I am the smelly outsider”; and by lighting one of his acrid cigarettes, he substantiated his position.
Mr. Middleton waved the epithet and the argument away. He would never think of compromising Monsieur Hanaud. He meant “see” and not examine, and here his friend Superintendent Holloway had come to his help. The superintendent had also wished to see Mr. Enoch Swallow. He had no charge to bring against Enoch. To Superintendent Holloway, as Superintendent, Enoch Swallow was the victim of misfortune, insured of course, but still a victim. None the less the superintendent wanted to have a look at him. He had accordingly asked him to call at the Marlborough Street police station at five o’clock.
“You see, the superintendent has a kindly, pleasant reason for his invitation. Mr. Swallow will be grateful and the superintendent will see him. Also you, Monsieur Hanaud, from the privacy of the superintendent’s office can see him too and perhaps—who knows—a memory may be jogged?”
Mr. Middleton stroked a whisker and smiled ingratiatingly.
“After all, twenty-five thousand pounds! It is a sum.”
“It is the whole multiplication table,” Hanaud agreed.

He hesitated for a moment. There was the Monument, there were the Crown Jewels. On the other hand, he liked Mr. Middleton's polite, engaging ways, he liked his whiskers and his frock-coat. Also he, too, would like to see the Syrian gentleman. For…

"He is either a very honest unlucky man, or he has a formula for fireworks." Hanaud looked at the clock. It was four.

"We have an hour. I make you a proposal. We will go to Berwick Street and see these ruins, though that beautiful frock coat will suffer."

Mr. Middleton beamed. "It would be worth many frock-coats to see Monsieur Hanaud at work," he exclaimed, and thereupon Mr. Ricardo made rather tartly—for undoubtedly he had been neglected—his one effective contribution to this story.

"But the frock-coat won't suffer, Mr. Middleton. Ask Hanaud! It will be in at the brush."

Installment Part III

To north and south of the house, Berwick Street had been roped off against the danger of those tottering walls. The Salvage Company had been at work since the early morning clearing the space within, but there were still beams insecurely poised overhead, and a litter of broken furniture and burnt furrier's stock encumbered the ground. Middleton's pass gave them admittance into the shell of the ground. Middleton's pass gave them admittance into the shell of the building. Hanaud looked around with the pleased admiration of a connoisseur for an artist's masterpiece.

"Aha!" he said brightly. "I fear that Misters the Unicorn pay twenty-five thousand pounds. It is of an admirable completeness, this fire. We say either 'What a misfortune!' or 'What a formula!'"

He advanced, very wary of the joists and beams balanced above his head, but shirking none of them. "You will not follow me, please," he said to Ricardo and Middleton. "It is not for your safety. But, as my friend Ricardo knows, too many cooks and I'm down the drain."

He went forward and about, mapping out from the fragments of inner walls the lie of the rooms. Once he stopped and came back to the two visitors.

"There was electric light of course," he said rather than asked. "I can see here and there plugs and pipes."

"There was nothing but electric light and power," Middleton replied firmly. "The cooking was done on an electric stove and the wires were all carried in steel tubes. Since the store and the stock were inflammable, we took particular care that these details were carried out."

Hanaud returned to his pacing. At one place a heavy iron bath had crashed through the first-floor ceiling to the ground, its white paint burnt off and its pipes twisted by the heat. At this bath he stopped again, he raised his head into the air and sniffed, then he bent down towards the ground and sniffed again. He stood up with a look of perplexity upon his face, a man trying to remember and completely baffled.

He moved away from this centre in various directions as though he was walking outwards along the spokes of a wheel, but he always came back to it. Finally, he stooped and began to examine some broken lumps of glass which lay about and in the bath. It seemed to the watchers that he picked one of these pieces up, turned it over in his hands, held it beneath his nose and finally put it away in one of his pockets. He returned to his companions.

"We must be at Marlborough Street at five," he said. "Let us go!"

Mr. Ricardo at the rope-barrier signaled to a taxi driver. They climbed into it, and sat in a row, both Middleton and Ricardo watching Hanaud expectantly, Hanaud sitting between them very upright with no more expression upon his face than has the image of an Egyptian king. At last he spoke.

“I tell you something.”

A sigh of relief broke from Mr. Middleton. Mr. Ricardo smiled and looked proud. His friend was certainly the Man who found the Lady under the thimble.

“Yes, I tell you. The Syrian gentleman has become an English gentleman. He owns a bath.”

Mr. Middleton groaned. Ricardo shrugged his shoulders. It was a deplorable fact that Hanaud never knew when not to be funny.

“But you smelt something,” said Mr. Middleton reproachfully.

“You definitely sniffed,” said Ricardo.

“Twice,” Mr Middleton insisted.

“Three times,” replied Hanaud.

“Ah!” cried Ricardo. “I know. It was petrol.”

“Yes,” exclaimed Mr. Middleton excitedly. “Petrol stored secretly in the bath.”

Hanaud shook his head.

“Not ’arf,” he said. “No, but perhaps I sniff,” and he laid a hand upon an arm of each of his companions, “a formula. But here we are, are we not? I see a policeman at a door.”

They had indeed reached Marlborough Street police station. A constable raised the flap of a counter and they passed into

a large room. An inner door opened and Superintendent Holloway appeared on the threshold, a large man with his hair speckled with grey, and a genial, intelligent face.

"Monsieur Hanaud!" he said, coming forward with an outstretched hand. "This is a pleasant moment for me."

"And the same to you," said Hanaud in his best English.

"You had better perhaps come into my room," the superintendent continued. "Mr. Swallow has not yet arrived."

He led his visitors into a comfortable office and, shutting the door, invited them all to be seated. A large—everything about the Marlborough Street police station seemed to Hanaud to be large—a large beautiful ginger cat with amber-coloured lambent eyes lay with his paws doubled up under his chest on a fourth chair, and surveyed the party with a godlike indifference.

"You will understand, Monsieur Hanaud," said the superintendent, "that I have nothing against Mr. Swallow at all. But I thought that I would like to see him, and I had an excellent excuse for asking him to call. I like to see people."

"I too," Hanaud answered politely. "I am of the sociables."

"You will have the advantage over me, of seeing without being seen," said the superintendent, and he broke off with an exclamation.

The ginger cat had risen from the chair and jumped down on to the floor. There it stretched out one hind leg and then the other, deliberately, as though it had the whole day for that and nothing else. Next it stepped daintily across the floor to Hanaud, licked like a dog the hand which he dropped to

stroke it, and then sprang on to his knee and settled down. Settled down, however, is not the word. It kept its head in the air and looked about in a curious excitement whilst its brown eyes shone like jewels.

"Well, upon my word," said the superintendent. "That's the first time that cat has recognized the existence of anyone in the station. But there it is. All cats are snobs."

It was a pretty compliment, and doubtless Monsieur Hanaud would have found a fitting reply had not the constable in the outer office raised his voice.

"If you'll come through and take a seat, sir, I'll tell the superintendent," he was heard to say, and Holloway rose to his feet.

"I'll leave the door ajar," he said in a low voice, and he went into the outer office.

Installment Part IV

Through the slit left open, Hanaud and Ricardo saw Enoch Swallow rise from his chair. He was a tall, broad man, almost as tall and broad as the superintendent himself, with black short hair and a flat, open, peasant face.

"You wished to see me?" he asked. He had a harsh metallic voice, but the question itself was ordinary and civil. The man was neither frightened, nor arrogant, nor indeed curious.

"Yes," replied the superintendent. "I must apologize for asking you to call at a time which must be very inconvenient to you. But we have something of yours."

"Something of mine?" asked Mr. Swallow, perhaps a little more slowly than was quite natural.

"Yes," said the superintendent briskly, "and I thought that you would probably like it returned to you at once."

"Of course. I thank you very much. I thought we had lost everything. What is it?" asked Mr. Swallow.

"A cat," the superintendent answered, and Mr. Swallow stood with his mouth open and the colour ebbing from his cheeks. The change in him was astonishing. A moment before he had been at his ease, confident, a trifle curious; now he was a man struck out of his wits; he watched the

superintendent with dazed eyes, he swallowed, and his face was the colour of dirty parchment.

"Yes, a big ginger cat," Holloway continued easily, "with the disdain of an Emperor. But the poor beast wasn't disdainful last night, I can tell you. As soon as the door was broken in —you had a pretty good door, Mr. Swallow, and a pretty strong lock—no burglars for you, Mr. Swallow, eh?" and the superintendent laughed genially—" well, as soon as it was broken in, the cat scampered out and ran up one of my officer's legs under his cape and clung there, whimpering and shaking and terrified out of its senses. And I don't wonder. It had a near shave of a cruel death."

"And you have it here, Superintendent?"

"Yes. I brought it here, gave it some milk, and it has owned my room ever since."

Enoch Swallow sat down again in his chair, and rather suddenly, for his knees were shaking. He gave one rather furtive look round the room and the ceiling. Then he said:

"I am grateful."

But he became aware with the mere speaking of the words that his exhibition of emotion required an ampler apology. "I explain to you," he said spreading out his hands. "For me cats are not so important. But my poor wife—she loves them. All last night, all today, she has made great trouble for me over the loss of our cat. In her mind she saw it burnt, its fur first sparks then flames. Horrible!" and Enoch Swallow shut his eyes. "Now that it is found unhurt, she will be happy. My store, my stock all gone, pouf! Of no consequence. But the

Ginger King back again, all is well," and with a broad smile, Enoch Swallow called the whole station to join him a humorous appreciation of the eccentricities of women.

"Right!" the superintendent exclaimed. "I'll fetch the Ginger King for you"; and at once all Enoch Swallow's muscles tightened and up went his hands in the air.

"Wait, please!" he cried. "There is a shop in Regent Street where they sell everything. I will run there and buy a basket with a lid for the Ginger King. Then you shall strap him in and I will take him to my wife, and tonight there will be no unpleasantness. One little moment!"

Mr. Enoch Swallow backed out of the entrance and was gone. Superintendent Holloway returned to his office with all the geniality gone from his face. He was frowning heavily.

"Did you ever see that man before, Monsieur Hanaud?" he asked.

"Never," said Hanaud decisively.

The superintendent shook his head.

"Funny! That's what I call him. Yes, funny."

Mr. Ricardo laughed in a superior way. There was no problem for him.

"'Some that are mad if they behold a cat,'" he quoted. "Really, really our William knew everything."

Monsieur Hanaud caught him up quickly.

"Yes, this Enoch Swallow, he hates a cat. He has the cat complex. He grows green at the thought that he must carry a cat in a basket, yes. Yet he has a cat in the house, he submits to a cat which he cannot endure without being sick, because

his wife loves it! Do you think it likely? Again I say ‘not ’arf.’”

A rattle and creak of wickerwork against the raised flap of the counter in the outer office announced Enoch Swallow’s return.

The superintendent picked up the Ginger King and walked with it into the outer office. Mr. Ricardo, glancing through the open doorway, saw Mr. Swallow’s dark face turn actually green. The sergeant at the desk, indeed, thought that he was going to faint, and started forward. Enoch Swallow caught hold upon himself. He held out the basket to the superintendent.

“If you will put him into it and strap the lid down, it will be all right. I make myself ridiculous,” he said, with a feeble attempt at a smile. “A big strong fellow whose stomach turns over at the sight of a cat. But it is so.”

The Ginger King resented the indignity of being imprisoned in a basket; it struggled and spat and bit as if it were the most communistic of cats, but the superintendent and the sergeant between them got it strapped down at last.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do, sir,” said Holloway. “I’ll send the little brute by one of my men round to your hotel—Percy Street, wasn’t it?—and then you won’t be bothered with it at all.”

But Enoch wouldn’t hear of putting the station to so much trouble.

“Oh no, no! You are kindness itself, Superintendent. But once he is in the basket, I shall not mind him. I shall take him

home at once and my wife will keep him away from me. It is all right. See, I carry him."

Enoch Swallow certainly did carry him, but very gingerly, and with the basket held well away from his side.

"It would be no trouble to send him along," the superintendent urged, but again the Syrian refused, and with the same vehemence which he had shown before. The police had its work to do. It would humiliate him to interfere with it for so small a reason.

"I have after all not very far to go," and with still more effusive protestations of his gratitude, he backed out of the police station.

The superintendent returned to his office.

"He wouldn't let me send it home for him," he said. He was a very mystified man. "Funny! That's what I call it. Yes, funny." He looked up and broke off suddenly. "Hallo! Where's Monsieur Hanaud gone to?"

Both Middleton and Ricardo had been watching through the crack in the door the scene in the outer office. Neither of them had seen or heard Hanaud go. There was a second door which opened on the passage to the street, and by that second door Hanaud had slipped away.

"I am sorry," said the superintendent, a little stiffly. "I should have liked to say goodbye to him."

The superintendent was hurt, and Mr. Ricardo hastened to reassure him.

"It wasn't discourtesy," he said staunchly. "Hanaud has manners. There is some reason."

Installment Part V

Middleton and Ricardo returned to the latter's house in Grosvenor Square, and there, a little more than an hour afterwards, Hanaud rejoined them. To their amazement he was carrying Enoch Swallow's basket, and from the basket he took out a contented, purring, gracious Ginger King.

"A little milk, perhaps?" Hanaud suggested. And having lapped up the milk, the Ginger King mounted a chair, turned in his paws under his chest and once more surveyed the world with indifferent eyes.

Hanaud explained his sudden departure.

"I could not understand why this man who could not abide a cat refused to let the superintendent send it home for him. No, however much he shivered and puked, he would carry it home himself. I had a little thought in my mind that he didn't mean to carry it home at all. So I slipped out into the street and waited for him and followed him. He had never seen me. It was as easy as the alphabet. He walked in a great hurry down to the Charing Cross Road and past the Trafalgar

Square and along the Avenue of Northumberland. At the bottom of the Avenue of Northumberland there is—what? Yes, you have guessed him. The river Thames. 'Aha,' I say to myself, 'my friend Enoch, you are going to drown the Ginger King. But I, Hanaud, will not allow it. For if you are so anxious to drown him, the Ginger King has something to tell us."

"So I close up upon his heels. He crossed the road, he leaned over the parapet, swinging the basket carelessly in his hand as though he was thinking of some important matter and not of the Ginger King at all. He looked on this side and that, and then I slip my hand under the basket from behind, and I say in his ear:

"'Sir, you will drop that basket, if you don't look out.'

"Enoch, he gave a great jump and he drop the basket, this time by accident. But my hand is under it. Then I take it by the handle, I make a bow. I hand it to him, I say 'Dr. Livingstone, I presume?' and lifting my hat, I walk away. But not so far. I see him black in the face with rage. But he dare not try the river again. He thinks for a little. Then he crosses the road and dashes through the Underground Station. I follow as before. But now he has seen me. He knows my dial," and at Middleton's surprised expression he added, "my face. It is a little English idiom I use. So I keep further back, but I do not lose him. He runs up that steep street. Half-way up, he turns to the right."

"John Street," said Mr. Ricardo.

“Half-way up John Street, there is a turning to the left under a building. It is a tunnel and dark. Enoch raced into the tunnel. I follow, and just as I come to the mouth of it, the Ginger King comes flashing out like a strip of yellow lightning. You see. He could not drown him, so in the dark tunnel he turns him loose with a kick no doubt to make him go. The Ginger King is no longer, if he ever was, the pet of the sad Mrs. Swallow. He is just a stray cat. Dogs will set on him, no one will find him, all the time he must run and very soon he will die.

“But this time he does not need to run. He sees or smells a friend, Hanaud of the Surete, that joke, that comic—eh, my friend?” and he dug a fist into Ricardo’s ribs which made that fastidious gentleman bend like a sapling in a wind. “Ah, you do not like the familiarities. But the Ginger King to the contrary. He stops, he mews, he arches his back and rubs his body against Hanaud’s leg. So I pick him up and I go on into the tunnel. It winds, and at the point where it bends I find the basket with the lid. It is logical. Enoch has dismissed the Ginger King. Therefore he wants nothing to remind him of the Ginger King. He drops the basket. I insert the Ginger King once more. He has confidence, he does not struggle. I strap down the lid. I come out of the tunnel. I am in the Strand. I look right and left and everywhere. There is no Enoch. I call a taximan.”

“And you are here,” said Ricardo, who thought the story had been more than sufficiently prolonged. But Hanaud shook his head.

“No, I am not here yet. There are matters of importance in between.”

“Very well,” said Ricardo languidly. “Proceed.”

And Hanaud proceeded.

“I put the basket on the seat and I say to the taximan, ‘I want’—guess what?—but you will not guess. ‘I want the top-dog chemist.’ The taximan wraps himself round and round with clothes and we arrive at the top-dog chemist. There I get just the information which I need and now, my friend Ricardo, here I am with the Ginger King who sits with a Chinese face and will tell us nothing of what he knows.”

Installment Part VI

But he was unjust. For later on that evening, in his own good time, the Ginger King told them plenty.

They were sitting at dinner at a small mahogany table bright with silver and fine glass: Mr. Ricardo between Hanaud and Middleton, and opposite to Ricardo, with his head just showing above the mahogany, the Ginger King. Suddenly one those little chancy things upon which Hanaud had preached his sermon, happened. The electric light went out.

They sat in the darkness, their voices silenced. Outside the windows the traffic rumbled by, suddenly important. An unreasonable suspense stole into the three men, and they sat very still and aware that each was breathing as lightly as he could. Perhaps for three minutes this odd tension lasted, and then the invaluable Thomson came into the room carrying a lighted lamp. It was an old-fashioned oil affair with a round of baize cloth under the base, a funnel and an opaque globe in the heart of which glowed a red flame.

“A fuse has blown, sir,” he said.

“At a most inconsiderable moment,” Mr. Ricardo replied. He had been in the middle of a story and he was not pleased.

“I’ll replace it at once, sir.”

“Do so, Thomson.”
Thomson set the glowing lamp in the middle of the table and withdrew. Mr. Middleton leaned forward towards Ricardo.
“You had reached the point where you tiptoed down the stairs—“
“No, no,” Ricardo interrupted. “The chain is broken. The savour of the story gone. It was a poor story, anyway.”
“You mustn’t say that,” cried Hanaud. “The story was of a thrill. The Miss Braddon at her best.”
“Oh well, well, if you really think so,” said Mr. Ricardo, tittering modestly; and there were the three faces smiling contentedly in the light of the lamp, when suddenly Hanaud uttered a cry.
“Look! Look!”
It was a cry so sharp that the other two men were captured by it and must look where Hanaud was looking. The Ginger King was staring at the lamp, its amber eyes as red as the flame in the globe, its body trembling. They saw it rise on to its feet and leap on to the edge of the table, where it crouched again, and rose again, its eyes never changing from their direction. Very delicately it padded between the silver ornaments across the shining mahogany. Then it sat back upon its haunches and, raising its forepaws, struck once violently at the globe of the lamp. The blow was so swift, so savage that it shocked the three men who watched. The lamp crashed upon the table with a sound of broken glass and the burning oil was running this way and that and dropping in great gouts of fire on to the carpet.

Middleton and Ricardo sprang up, a chair was overturned.

"We'll have the whole house on fire," cried Ricardo as the rang the bell in a panic; and Hanaud had just time to snatch up the cat as it dived at the green cloth on the base of the stand, before the flames caught it; and it screamed and fought and clawed like a mad thing. To get away? No, but to get back to the overturned lamp.

Already there was a smell of burning fabrics in the room. Some dried feathery grass in a vase caught a sprinkle of the burning oil and flamed up against the wallpaper. Thomson arrived with all the rugs he could hurriedly gather to smother the fire. Pails of water were brought, but a good many minutes had passed before the conflagration was extinguished, and the four men, with their clothes disheveled, and their hands and faces begrimed, could look round upon the ruin of the room.

"I should have guessed," said Hanaud remorsefully. "The Unicorn Company saves its twenty-five thousand pounds—yes, but Mr. Ricardo's fine dining-room will need a good deal of restoration."

Installment Part VII

Later on that night, in a smaller room, when the electric light was burning and the three men were washed and refreshed, Hanaud made his apology.

"I asked you, Mr. Middleton, inside the burnt walls of the house in Berwick Street, whether it was lit with electric light. And you answered, 'with that and with nothing else.' But I had seen a broken oil lamp amongst the littler. I suspected that lamp, but the house was empty for an hour and a half before the fire broke out. I couldn't get over that fact. Then I smelt something, something acrid—just a whiff of it. It came from a broken bottle lying by the bath with other broken bottles and a broken glass shelf, such as a man has in his bathroom to hold his little medicines, his tooth paste, his shaving soap. I put the broken bottle in my pocket and a little of that pungent smell clung to my fingers.

"At the police station at once the cat made friends with me. Why? I did not guess. In fact I flattered myself a little. I say, 'Hanaud, animals love you.' But it was not so. The Ginger King loved my smelly fingers, that was all. Then came the strange behaviour of Enoch Swallow. Cats made him physically sick. Yet this one he must take away before it could betray him. He could not carry it under his coat—no,

that was too much. But he could go out and buy a basket—and without any fear. Do you remember, how cunningly he looked around the office, and up at the ceiling, and how satisfied he was to leave the cat with us. Why? I noticed the look, but I could not understand it. It was because all the lights in the room were bulbs hanging from the ceiling. There was not a standing lamp anywhere. Afterwards I get the cat. I drive to the chemist, leaving the cat in its basket in the cab.

"I pull out my broken bottle and I ask the chemist. "What is it that was in this bottle?"

"He smells and he says at once, 'Valerian.'

"I say, 'What is valerian?'

"He answers, 'Valerian has a volatile oil which when exposed to the air develops a pungent and unpleasant smell. It is used for hysteria, insomnia and nervous ailments.'

"That does not help me, but I draw a target at a venture. I ask, 'Has it anything to do with cats?'

"The chemist, he looks at me as if I was off my rocker and he says, 'It drives them mad, that's all,' and at once I say:

"'Give me some!'" and Hanaud fetched out of his pocket a bottle of tincture of valerian.

"I have this—yes. But I am still a little stupid. I do not connect the broken lamp and the valerian and the Ginger King—no, not until I see him step up with his eyes all mad and on fire on to the mahogany table. And then it is too late.

"You see, the good Enoch practiced a little first. He smears the valerian on the base of the lamp and he teaches the cat to knock it over to get at the valerian. Then one night he shuts

the cat up in some thin linen bag through which in time it can claw its freedom. He smears the base of the lamp with the valerian, lights it and goes off to the cinema.

"The house is empty—yes. But the cat is there in the bag, and the lamp is lit and every minute the valerian at the bottom of the lamp smells more and more. And more and more the cat is maddened. Tonight there was no valerian on the lamp, but the Ginger King—he knows that that is where valerian is to be found. I shall find out when I get back to Paris whether there was any trace of a burnt cat at the fire on the Boulevard Haussmann.

"But," and he turned towards Mr. Middleton, "you will keep the Ginger King that he may repeat his performance at the Courts of Law, and you will not pay one brass bean to that honest peasant from Syria."

THE END

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